

40 Mr. WHITEFIELD's Journal

Surely against thy Holy Son,
(Son of thy Love and sent by Thee,
One with th' anointing Spirit, One,
With thy co-equal Majesty.)

Herod and Pilate both combin'd,
Thy Sov'reign Purpose to fulfil,
Gentiles and Jews unconscious join'd,
T'accomplish thy Eternal Will.

And now their idle Fury view,
And now behold their Threatnings, LORD,
Behold Thy faithful Servants too,
And strengthen us to speak thy Word.

Embolden'd by thine outstretch'd Arm,
Fill us with Confidence Divine,
With Heav'nly Zeal our Bosom warm,
That all may own the Work is Thine.

May see the Tokens of thy Hand,
Its Sov'reign Grace, its healing Pow'r,
No more their Happiness withstand,
And fight against their GOD no more.

Now let their Opposition cease,
Now let them catch the quick'ning Flame,
And forc'd to yield, the Signs increase,
The Wonders wrought by JESU's Name.

F I N I S.

70
An Enquiry into the Present Duty of
PROTESTANT DISSENTERS.

A
S E R M O N

Preach'd at the

Merchant's-Lecture

A T

SALTERS-HALL,

JANUARY 22, 17 $\frac{1}{2}$.

By DANIEL WILLIAMS, D.D.

The Second Edition.

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THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

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Merchand's-Lecture

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MARK X. 29, 30.

And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no Man that hath left House, or Brethren, or Sisters, or Father, or Mother, or Wife, or Children, or Lands, for my sake and the Gospels; But he shall receive an hundred-fold now in this time, Houses, and Brethren, and Sisters, and Mothers, and Children, and Lands, with Persecution: and in the World to come eternal Life.

OUR Blessed Saviour having detected the Hypocrisy of the Ruler, who seem'd very intent to obtain Eternal Life, he condescends to answer St. Peter's Demand, by the Words of the Text: Where you find,

1. The Cause wherein the sincere Followers of Christ are engaged. Here he expresses it, *For my sake and the Gospel's*. In *Mat. 10. 29.* it's *for my Name's sake*. In *Luke 18. 29.* it's *for the Kingdom of God's sake*: By espousing, adhering to, and acting pursuant to these, the Christian proposes to himself the obtaining eternal Life. Christ Jesus is the Head of the Gospel-Kingdom, the Gospel is the Rule and Law of it; Persons devoted to Christ are the Subjects of it: His Authority, Rights, Truths, Interests and Honour, they are to maintain, and promote by all just Means.

2. The Sufferings to which they are exposed by their Faithfulness to Christ and his Interests; *They leave Houses, &c.* i. e. We must renounce the most desirable things which oppose our Closing with, and Acceptance of him, as our Lord and chief Good. This is call'd, *Selling all for the Pearl of Price*, *Matth. 13. 46.* His Subjects must also refuse the greatest Advantages, which would bribe them to be disloyal to him, or treacherous in what concerns his Interests and

Honour; and they must willingly consent to suffer the Loss of all their worldly Enjoyments, which they cannot possess without renouncing his Truth, violating his Rules, injuring his Rights, or neglecting what's incumbent on them, for the Defence and Advancement of any of these.

Our Lord here enumerates many things, of which Nature is fond, as dear Relations and Estate. Elsewhere he adds Reputation, Liberty, Ease, and Life it self, *Mark 8. 39*. All that makes up the Idol of a Carnal Mind must be parted with; and the contrary Exercises, which are most ungrateful to Sense, must be endured, whenever our Christian Profession requires it.

He is no true Disciple of Christ, who does not from the Heart resolve and engage to do this, if called to it; he is no persevering Saint, nor an Heir of Glory, who suffers not Imprisonment, Poverty, Loss of Relations, Torments, yea Death it self, rather than forsake Christ and his Cause.

3. The Believer's Advantage by his greatest Sufferings for Christ; *In this time an hundred-fold, and in the World to come eternal Life*. A Point not easily believed, therefore our Lord does solemnly attest it, *Verily I say unto you, &c.* Left any should think the Benefit was designed only for the Apostles, or some eminent Saints; he extends it to every one that suffers what's necessary to express his sincere Devotedness and Adherence to the Lord Jesus and his Cause; *There's no Man that has left Houses, &c.*

Observe, They who leave most for Christ and his Gospel, shall be abundant Gainers by it.

I have in *three Sermons* treated of this Observation in the Method following.

1. I have explained, when Persons may be said to leave these things for Christ and his Gospel.

2. As also whence it is, that Men by adhering to Christ, should be expos'd to such Hardships. Under which Head, I also gave you a large Account of the great Purposes our Lord subserves, in erecting, maintaining, and advancing his Kingdom by these fore Trials of his Followers.

3. I have proved fully, that they who lose and suffer most for Christ, are great Gainers even in *this World*, by being not only free from the present Horror and Plagues of Apostates; but also by the Divine Comforts, Spiritual Supports, and

and Profit, from what they endure ; as also by a great Blessing on what external Benefits are continu'd ; which I demonstrated to be in themselves, and in the Judgment of the most wise and experienc'd, exceedingly better than all the temporal Good they can lose for the Sake of Christ. 2. In the World to come, the Advantage is inconceivable, as appeared by comparing the positive Good of Eternal Life, with all the Good we can lose by our Fidelity ; and comparing the endless Misery thereby prevented, with the greatest Evils it can expose us to in time.

But these things, with that Part of the Application I made in the former Discourses, I pass over, and shall now proceed to a fourth *Inference*.

4. *Inf.* It is true Wisdom to be well and rightly instructed in what concerns the Honour and Interest of the Lord Jesus in our Day and Place, and to be always ready to quit and lose all for the sake thereof.

This is justly inferr'd as to both the Parts. For,

1. If when we suffer, we should take that to be the Interest of Christ which is not so, we shall reap no Advantage by what we lose or endure, because it's not for Christ, but for our own Delusion and Mistake that we suffer ; which is Folly. On the other hand, if we are tried on any Point, wherein the Interest of Christ really consisteth, but *we by Mistake* deny it to be so, and refuse to suffer for the Profession of it, when called to adhere thereto ; in that Case we foolishly refuse that Benefit which our Lord promiseth to his Martyrs and Confessors, and expose our selves to the Punishments denounced against such as desert his Cause. To say I was mistaken, will not excuse ; when by Prayer and faithful Searches, we might have known the Will of Christ, and escaped that Error. For the Truth and Reality of any part of the Cause of Christ, depends not on Man's Judgment. *Paul* was a culpable Opposer of Christ, tho' he *verily thought he might do many things against his Name*, Acts 26. 9.

2. It's also justly inferr'd, that we should be always ready to quit all for Christ and his Interest.

For it's very common to be convinced, that this or that Point is the Truth or Concern of our Lord, for which we ought to sacrifice our All, and yet refuse to do it, because we have neglected to fix our Resolutions, and prepare our selves, to part with whatever our Adherence to Christ must cost

cost us. Souls thus unprovided of suitable Graces, are easily surprized to make Shipwreck of Faith and a good Conscience, and thereby come short of the Advantages, which they might reap by enduring Tribulations and Losses on Christ's Account; he having fix'd this Rule for his Distributions; *If we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him; if we deny him, he will also deny us*, 2 Tim. 2. 12.

Upon the whole, if it be true Wisdom to pursue our highest Advantage (which I have in the former Discourses proved to consist in leaving all for Christ and his Cause) it must be true Wisdom to know the Cause of Christ, and be prepared to leave all for it, seeing that both are absolutely necessary to our obtaining that Advantage.

These two Things being of such Importance, I shall in the Name of our Lord Jesus require all of you to comply with these following Exhortations.

1. Labour to become rightly instructed in what concerns the Rights and Interest of the Lord Jesus.

This needs most Care and Sincerity, because it's oft intricate; we are too apt to mistake, and many forward to seduce us; and their Suggestions which tend to avoid Sufferings, have a great Advantage in our present State.

This Matter is *worthy of all our Diligence and Labour*; for it's a great Blessing to understand what God would have us espouse, abet, and be zealous for. It's no small Honour and Privilege, to be possessed of the Cause of Christ, and be of the Number of those, who *have the Testimony of Jesus, and keep his Commandments*, Rev. 12. 17. for then we are led by his Spirit, we keep in his Way, we are on his Side against Satan, in that War which is waged between them; of which we are informed by those Words of our Saviour, *He that is not for me, is against me*, Mat. 12. 30. Again, when we have the Cause of Christ in our Hands, we may expect his Assistance, and shall be inwardly satisfied, that we are pleasing him, to whom we are indebted, and on whose Favour we depend for all Happiness: We are also carrying on his Designs in our Day, which must appear glorious, and in due Time prevail. Such Things will give us Peace and Courage under all the Hardships, to which we can be exposed; saying with the Apostle, *According to my earnest Expectation and my Hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all Boldness, as always, so now also, Christ shall be magnified in*
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my Body, whether it be by Life or by Death, for to me to live is Christ, Phil. i. 20, 21.

That I may assist you in discovering the Rights and Interest of our Lord, so that you may not mistake in what ought to direct your Practice, I shall

I. Set down 7 Propositions, as Preliminaries.

II. I shall apply them to a Question now depending, and of great Consequence to us *Dissenting Protestants*.

I. I shall set down 7 Propositions, as Preliminaries to the Determination of the intended Question.

Prop. 1. *The Lord Jesus hath a Cause in this Earth.*

It is so, whether many understand it or not; it's so, tho' it lies near the Hearts of few: This ought to have Place in the Prayers of Saints in all Ages; as *Psal. 74. 22. Plead the Cause which is thine own.*

Our Lord having laid down his Life for the Redemption of Mankind, according to that Covenant, which adjusted the Terms of the Impetration of saving Benefits, has *all Power given him*, Mat. 28. 18. he sets up a Kingdom more visibly *Mediatorial* than before, and a Gospel-State, with many Institutions, bearing a peculiar Respect to his Authority and Purposes as God-Man-Mediator. *He is Head over all things to his Church*, Eph. 1. 22. for the Gathering, Managing, Ruling, Preserving and Improving the Church, as his Inheritance and Reward. Of him is that spoken, *Zech. 6. 12, 13. He shall build the Temple of the Lord, even he; and he shall bear the Glory, and shall sit upon his Throne, and be a Priest upon his Throne.* His Authority is incontestible, and his Claim to Honour and Observance inviolable, in whatever beareth his Royal Stamp, or is appropriated to him in Opposition to his Rivals, or is any Part of his intended Conquest over the Devil, the World, and the Flesh.

Therefore, whatever Truth he commands Men to believe, what Laws he enacts to be observed, whatever Discipline, Ordinance and Office he institutes, and what he reveals to be his Purpose to effect by these, are his Cause and Interest on Earth, whoever do oppose them. It's the Concern of his Dominion and Honour, that these prevail; and before he delivers up his Kingdom, *he will put down whatever is contrary hereto*, 1 Cor. 15. 24, 28.

Prop.

Prop. 2. *Every Degree of Reformation is so far the Cause of Christ; and this is abetted by all those, who promote it in a proper way.*

When our Lord had asserted his Authority, he requires his Apostles to go and teach all Nations, to observe all things whatsoever he commanded them, Mat. 28. 20.

He has appointed the Rule, (the Nature and Perfection of it I shall speak of hereafter) an exact Conformity to it is required; every Deviation from it is a Fault; the enacting any thing opposite to any Part of this Rule, is a Challenge to the Authority of Christ who appointed it, and a Diminution of his Honour. Therefore when Attempts to reduce Things to this true Standard succeed, then his Interest prevails; and they who use due Means to effect this, their Endeavours are laid out for what the Lord will acknowledge to be his own Cause.

As it's said of Jehoshaphat, 2 Chron. 19. 4. when he restored the Worship of God, and took away the idolatrous Groves, he brought the People back unto the Lord; so when the Gospel Institutions are corrupted in any Degree, they who recover Men from such defiling Usages, do truly bring them back to the Lord. It's the same as to Reformation in Morals; for one great Design of Christ is, to turn away every Man from his Iniquity, and make them zealous of all good Works, Acts 3. 26. Tit. 2. 14.

Prop. 3. *The Interest of Christ is contained, sometimes in greater and plainer things, sometimes in lesser and more obscure things.*

When the Apostle is erecting the Kingdom of Christ among the Pagan Gentiles, he first attempteth to bring them to know and worship the one living and true God, and to turn from Idols, Acts 17. 23, to ver. 30. But he proceeds from what was revealed by Natural Light, to that which was revealed by Inspiration, ver. 31. The like you find, 1. Thes. 1. 2, 19.

Among the Jews, who worshiped the true God, the first Efforts of our Redeemer's Kingdom consisted in bringing Men to acknowledge him to be the Messiah; this was the grand Point debated among them; and the Apostles apply themselves to the Proof of this, as the great Fundamental,

on which other things depended. When the *Jews* and others came to believe and receive this, the Interest of our Lord prevailed as to this great Fundamental.

But did the Apostles think the Cause of Christ extended no lower or farther; when this great Article was gained? No, no; they zealously assert that Christ had an Interest in Matters of less Moment, even in Institutions opposite to the *Mosaic* Rituals and Oeconomy; and that it was as truly his Cause, that these last should be laid aside, as that they should believe him to be the Messiah; for when the Judaizing Christians were resolved to retain Circumcision, the Apostle tells them, *Gal. 5. 2. If you be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing*; q. d. your believing him to be the Christ, will not avail you to Salvation, if you refuse that Liberty from the *Mosaic* Yoke, which the Christian Institutions introduce.

The same Apostle shews, that other Usages and *Jewish* Rites, as those about *Meats, new Moons, &c.* were contrary to the Interest of Christ, *Col. 2. 16, 17, 20.* yea, all *vain Deceits after the Traditions of Men, and Rudiments of the World, and Commandments of Men*, are alike prejudicial to his Cause, and the Welfare of Souls, *v. 8, 18, 22, 23.* The black Mark laid on them is, they are *not after Christ*; they are not according to his Rule, they bear not the Stamp of his Authority, they correspond not with his Designs, they serve not his Purposes, they are unlike his Spiritual Institutions, and suit not his Kingdom. Can any Man imagine, that the Interest of Christ is not concerned in opposing these lesser things, when we see them thus branded by the Holy Ghost?

When Matters are comparatively small, they do not thereby cease to have a Place in what our Lord now reckons to be his Interest, any more than the Removal of the less faulty Groves and high Places in *Judah* ceased to be his Concern. In some Groves and high Places Idols were worshipped. There were also high Places wherein the People *sacrificed unto the Lord God only*, *2 Chron. 33. 17.* These latter were far more innocent than the former; and yet were so offensive to God, that *Asa, Jehoshaphat*, and many good Kings who destroyed the idolatrous high Places, are stigmatized with this Defect, that they took not away those other high Places: And *Hezekiah* and *Josiah* commended, as Reformers more pleasing, faithful and zealous

for God, because they destroyed these as well as the others.

Prop. 4. *The Servants of Christ are obliged to adhere to his Interest in those very things, which may appear small in their own Nature.*

Their Character and Duty it is to follow the Lamb wherever he goes, Rev. 14. 4. They must with Caleb follow him fully and wholly, Num. 14. 24. and Chap. 32. 12. Whatever he adopts to be a part of his Cause, is sufficiently great for them to espouse, and of too great Moment to be neglected by them. Nothing of the Concerns of the Redeemer should be despised as small, because his Authority is great, all his Affairs are wisely adjusted, and the least conducive to great Ends. Every Pin in his Temple is necessary, and designed for its proper Use.

We may not know (nor is it fit we should) what use he will make, or the high Purposes he intends to serve, by what seems to us of small Account in it self. But we may easily judge, that adhering firmly to the least Point, which Christ is advancing, is a Means to prevent the opposite Corruption, and will (if it be his time) proceed to further Steps in what promotes his Kingdom.

Again, a faithful Opposition to a lesser Corruption, is the way to prevent greater Defilements; whereas complying to admit of the least, is opening the way for greater, and for more in Number. St. Paul judged it his Duty, to contend earnestly with St. Peter, and others, when they forbore to eat with the Gentiles, and thereby encourag'd the Judaizing Christians in their Separation from the Gentile Converts, Gal. 2. 11, 13. Yea, he declares this Liberty he strove for, to be the Truth of the Gospel, and however inconsiderable a Point it seem'd, he would not give Place, no not for an Hour, to such as would abridge him or others of any part of it, ver. 4, 5, 14.

Anti christian Popery began in a Violation of the Laws and Rights of our Lord in what appear'd small and inconsiderable in their own Nature. These being neglected, gradually introduced abominable Idolatries and Usurpations, which polluted and enslaved the far greater part of the Christian Church. This had not been, if Men had discharged their Duty, by cleaving to the Cause of Christ in those first Encroachments.

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Moreover, our Lord may fix on the smallest Matters, as a *Trial* of our Obedience and Sincerity towards him; nor can we be free from much Guilt, if we are disloyal and unfaithful to him in the least Matters. God denounced great Punishments against his People *Israel*, if they disobey'd or departed from those Ceremonial Injunctions, which had nothing in their own Nature to commend them, or dissuade from them. But God took Care to vindicate his own Authority, for with him *Rebellion is as the Sin of Witchcraft*; tho' *Saul* thought the Goods consecrated to a holy Purpose, but would have been wasted if he had observed God's Command, 1 *Sam.* 15. 23. Our Redeemer puts his Cause into the Hands of his Followers, he trusteth them whom he calls to be Witnesses to him: he that will be false to Christ in a small Matter, will betray his Interest in a greater Point, if tried. He that against his Conscience will comply with *Superstition*, will in great Danger yield to *Idolatry*; for his deserting the Testimony of Christ in the one, argues that Want of Love, Zeal and Devotedness to Christ, which will suffer him to deal treacherously in the other: and denying the Authority of Christ, by offending in the lesser Matter, he is so virtually guilty of all, as to be easily induced to commit the greater, *Jam.* 2. 19.

Prop. 5. *When, and where, any part of the Cause of Christ becomes publickly contended, and attended with great Consequences, that becomes the Point, by which he will have the Fidelity of his Servants tried in that Time and Place.*

The Lord Jesus, in his Contests with Satan, conquers by Degrees, and is continually managing the War stated between both their Kingdoms, by proceeding to take away more refined Defilements and Defects, after he has removed such as are more notoriously enormous. In like manner, after he has made considerable Advances in the greater and more manifest Affairs of his Kingdom, he introduceth what's further compleating and perfecting of that Purity and Order which his Rules appoint.

On the other hand, the Devil (with his acted Auxiliaries) maintains the Opposition as long as he can; is active to retrieve what he has lost; with Vigor and Craft attempting to overthrow what Christ has built up, or at least to obstruct those further Advances of Truth and Purity, which

are nearest to a full Conformity to the Laws of the Redeemer. And as his subtle Suggestions, and what gratifies the various Lusts of Men, give him a great Advantage ; so he neglects not to use it, in disputing every Inch of Ground, in those several ways, as he thinks most accommodated to his Purpose in every Age and Place.

A wise Observer of past times may easily trace this *Serpent's* Attempts, sometimes by *Errors*, and these oft from one Extreme to another, or descending to such as were less dangerous, when the greater Doctrines prevailed ; or new vamping such old Errors as were exploded.

Sometimes he has taken Occasion from the ignorant Devoutness of good People, or the wanton Fancies of Men less serious, to corrupt the Worship of God by human Inventions ; or by the Ambition of the powerful, further to usurp the Rights and Royalties of our blessed Lord, by imposing such things ; and no wonder if by the blind Zeal of such proud and carnal Persons, he soon rais'd Persecutions, silenced those faithful Ministers who resisted such Invasions on the Prerogatives of Christ ; to the Ruin of his Discipline, Destruction of Love, and the true Christian Oeconomy.

You may easily infer, that there is in various Times and Places a *present Truth*, 2 Pet. 1. 12. that is, a Truth which Christ is then propagating in a special manner, and Satan opposing by the contrary Error. In like manner, there are present Corruptions, from which the Faithful should be especial careful to keep *their Garments undefiled, as those few in Sardis did*, Rev. 3. 4. so in various Times and Places the Lord Jesus has several Points of Reformation to advance, and Parts of his Testimony to be attested.

When any one of these is openly staged, generally or by many warmly contended, and attended with great Consequences, to the great Advantage or Detriment of the Church, as to its spiritual Worship, Peace and the Power of Godliness: You may be then assured, that Providence has fixed that Matter, as the present Point whereby the Servants of Christ shall be tried: And however inconsiderable the Matter is in it self, the *right side* of it is his Cause, to which they must adhere as their great Duty at present ; whether it consist in promoting his Attempts of further Reformation, or opposing Satan's Efforts to overthrow what Christ has gained. Nor will other uncontested Matters, though greater in their
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own Nature, give equal Evidence of any Man's loyal Subjection to the Lord Jesus.

Prop. 6. *The way to know what is truly the Cause and Interest of Christ, is a diligent Study of his Word, fervent Prayer, and a wise Observation of Providence.*

The Apostacy made that Change in our State, that the Light of Nature is not fit to direct Sinners, in what concerns the Worship of God, Man's Recovery, and the Mediator's Interests; therefore God, by inspired Revelation, or other supernatural Ways, has prescribed what Worship he will accept, and what Means he will bless to spiritual Purposes. He thus before the Law appointed Sacrifices, Circumcision, and a Priesthood. When he erected in Israel a Church, he gave them Laws and Ordinances concerning the most minute Matters, which refer'd to his Worship and Service, requiring an exact Observation of his Will in every Particular, forbidding them *to add or diminish any thing*, Deut. 12. 32. the very Tabernacle must be made after the Pattern which God gave Moses, Exod. 25. 8, 9. and of all Utensils, Priests Garments, &c. it's oft repeated, *they made them as God commanded Moses*, Exod. 28. 4, 5, &c. In like Manner, all after Changes as to the Temple and Worship therein, were under God's immediate Directions to David and Solomon, 1 Chron. 28. 11, 12. and 2 Chron. 8. 14. And when Hezekiah, Josiah, and others set on the Work of Reformation, it was by the Word of the Lord, and they bring Things back to his Pattern, 2 Chron. 29. 17. and 30. 16. 2 Kings 23. 3, 21, 24.

In the Christian State there is equal Need of supernatural Revelations, as to the Laws and Ordinance, relating to it; yea, there's more Necessity, because the Rights, Claims, and Ways of communicating Benefits by the Mediator as such, are more remote from the Light of Nature, and less fit to be adjusted by human Skill.

Our Lord Jesus has personally on Earth, and more fully by his inspired Apostles, recorded so much, as with what was written before, is sufficient to declare his Will concerning these Things, and that so amply, as *to be profitable for Doctrine, for Reproof, for Correction, for Instruction in Righteousness: That the Man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good Works*, 2 Tim. 3. 16, 17.

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Herein he declared what are the Laws and Institutions of his House, the Terms of Communion of Saints, the Manner and Matter of Worship, the Nature, Power, and Qualifications of Gospel Officers, what Service he will accept, what Means he will bless to saving Ends, what are the Articles of our Faith, the Nature of his Kingdom, &c. and gave particular Precepts concerning them.

There be indeed some general Rules, as *that all be done to the Glory of God*, which requires our aiming as his Glory in all Acts of Obedience, and regulating all our common and indifferent Actions with the greatest Tendency to his Glory, upon an impartial Weighing of all Circumstances.

But this Rule does by no Means allow Men to invent of their own Heads any Part of Divine Worship, or make any Additions or Alterations, that argue an Imperfection in those particular Rules, which direct the Matters that refer thereto; because this is so far from being to the Glory of our Lord, that it highly reflects on his Wisdom and Goodness; on his *Wisdom*, as if he knew not how to accommodate his Rules perfectly to the Glory of God, and the Necessities and Benefit of his Church; on his *Goodness*, that in Matters so nearly relating to the Edification and Peace of his Church, he could have made full Provision, but would not. Moreover, it's dishonourable to him, as it equals Mens Authority with the Authority of Christ, in that they make Laws about the same Matters, and to the same Spiritual Purposes, which his own Laws are sufficient for. And their doing thus, in Things about which he has forbidden all Additions and Changes, is not only to *set their Posts by his Posts*, but far above them.

Another general Rule you find, *1 Cor. 14. 40. Let all things be done decently, and in Order*. This is to prevent shameful Disorders and Confusions in the Prophets Exercise of their Gifts in the Church; and can require in other Cases no more, than that we perform all Things with that Comeliness and Order, as that our doing otherwise would, by the Light of Nature, or warrantable Custom, be judg'd unseemly and disorderly.

But this general Rule must be sadly wrested by those, who to please their Fancy make Orders, by which the Institutions of our Saviour must be better regulated, more adorned, and more pompous; and thereby so insult the particu-

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lar Rules he has enacted about the Administration of his Ordinances, that whosoever administers or attends them exactly by those Rules, he does it *indecently*, and in a *disorderly* Manner. Which is a bold Impeachment also against Christ and his Apostles, as acting unseemly and disorderly in the Examples they gave us; for their Practice in these Matters we take as a Part of the Rule, by which we act in these sacred Affairs.

It must be yet stranger, that any should by this Rule, of *doing all things decently and in order*, be warranted to require ridiculous, unseemly, light Usages, attended with *Confusion*, and this in Divine Worship, which ought to be grave, sedate, solemn, spiritual, expressive of the Exercise of inward Graces, and a Disposition for Communion with the living God.

Our Lord Jesus was as *faithful in his House as Moses*, Heb. 3. 3, 5. Which may assure us, that he has given *sufficient* Directions about his Worship, Sacraments, the Qualifications of Ministers, Communion of Saints, &c. by the particular Rules contained in the Precepts and Examples recorded in the Scriptures, or by clear Consequences deduced thence. Therefore search and study those, pray that *the Lord will give you Understanding in all things* which concern you, as directed by these, 2 Tim. 2. 7. *To the Law and to the Testimony appeal* in all these Cases, Isa. 8. 20. for you can do no more in *Faith*, or as obediential Acts in sacred Matters, than as you rest on the Word for Light.

When the Church arrives to the Height of these Rules, it will be perfectly reformed; as far as it comes short, it is defective. Whatever is *contrary* to these, is Rebellion; and when wise Men dare teach the *Fear* (or Worship) of God by the *Doctrines of Men*, he threatens *their Wisdom shall perish*, Isa. 29. 13, 14.

To add to these Rules, is an Usurpation of the Rights of our Lord; and such Additions are profane and polluting; they make not Worship acceptable, but provoking; they are so far from rendring it more available, that Christ saith, *In vain do they worship me, teaching the Commandments of Men*, Mat. 15. 9. Whereas in following the Rules of Christ, we may expect a Blessing to spiritual Benefit, and Acceptance with him: In adhering to these, when contended, we are faithful to *his Cause*, who is too jealous about sacred things,

to leave to Mens Determination more than external Circumstances, necessary and common to other natural Actions; and not this neither, without such Limits, as make these subservient to the Conveniency, and consist with the Edification of such as worship him.

I mention'd a *wise Observation of Providence* as a Help to know the Interest of Christ. As to this, my Time will allow me to say no more, than that it will be of use to us in this Matter, to observe what Providence appears to design effecting, what Prophecies it is accomplishing, how it has influenced the Minds of the most eminent Saints as to the things disputed, how it has owned such, when they faithfully adhered to what they judged to be his Interest; what Effect one or other of these, or of Things of the like Nature, has had heretofore upon the *Vitals* of Religion, and what these are like to have for the future, &c.

Prop. 7. When espousing and adhering to the present contend- ed Interest of Christ, is attended with Sufferings, the best Men have Reason to be jealous, lest their Judgment be prejudic'd or bias'd.

There's naturally in all Men an Aversion to Suffering, which prompts them to wish, they were not obliged to endure Hardships, especially if severe. The *Flesh* is altogether an Enemy to Tribulation, and strives to weaken the Force of all those Reasons, which urge the Necessity of losing Honour, Estates, Places, Ease, Liberty or Life.

It will find a thousand Excuses, and offer numberless Arguments against quitting such desirable things; such as, that the Matter is too small to lay such a Stress on't, it's an indifferent thing with many, all good Men are not agreed in it; were it denying the Lord Jesus to be the Messiah, or worshipping an Idol, it would require the Loss of these things; but at most it's but complying with what's a little less pure, a little more distant from the Rule of the Gospel, &c.

As far as the *Flesh* prevails, such Reasonings will much affect, and appear stronger than plainer Arguments on the other side, especially if God permit Satan to manage them by his Suggestions.

There being Remains of *Flesh* in the holiest of you, it's meet that you be jealous of your selves, and make Allowance for the Advantage, which the corrupt Part has to blind and deceive you.

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Therefore pray earnestly, that God would direct and determine your Judgment; *Consult not with Flesh and Blood,* Gal. 1. 16. consider impartially the Word of God, and by that decide concerning your Duty. Judge as sedately as the Importance of the Matter requires; judge as impartially, as if you were judging for another Man; see that you are upright in Heart, for *Integrity* will go far to guide you, Prov. 11. 3. whereas a false Heart will easily deny that to be the Cause of Christ, which exposeth to Suffering.

Finally, when you are enquiring whether it be the Cause of Christ, and that you are now called to suffer for it, have it on your Mind, and decide it, when you are in the most heavenly Frame, when Grace is in the liveliest Exercise, when your Communion with Christ is nearest and most affecting, and your Hearts relishing the Hopes of eternal Life, to a just Contempt of this present World.

II. I shall apply some of these Propositions to a Question now depending, and of great Consequence to Dissenting Protestants. The Question is,

Whether the Members of Protestant Dissenting Churches lawfully may altogether stately desert our publick Assemblies for Worship, as a Qualification to hold their present Offices?

The Question might be farther extended, and determine concerning many others, besides the Members of our Churches.

Before I fully state and explain the Question, I shall consider the Subject of it, viz. the Members of Protestant Dissenting Churches. Their present Relation to these Churches is a publick Signification, that they are convinced and persuaded in their Consciences, upon what they think just Grounds, that the Points in Difference between us and the legally establish'd Church are such, and so circumstantiated, as therein we are on the side of the Interest of Christ, and his Cause is in our Hands; and being so long and publickly debated, and now attended with such Consequences, they become the present Trial of their Fidelity to Christ and his Interest; though the Points in their own Nature are not so essential as are many other Points in Religion.

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When they by their Practice declare this to be their settled Judgment, they yet acknowledge the great Piety and Worth of many, who differ from them in these Matters, as thinking them too inconsiderable to bear that Stress which we put on them. Nor do we think the Faults, which we desire to be rectified, to be such, as to exclude those from being Churches of Christ, who retain them; yea, we approve that our own Members should testify their Charity, by Occasional Communion with them.

It would be censorious to doubt, whether pious good Men, who are Members of Dissenting Churches, are so upon Principle of Conscience? Many have testified by their Sufferings, that they are convinced the Grounds of their Dissent are just, and that it's the Cause of our blessed Lord to which they adhere. I shall very briefly represent what they generally apprehend of these things; (1.) As to the Nature of them. (2.) The Circumstances and Consequences of them as they fall under the former Propositions.

(1.) As to the Nature of them: They believe, according to *Prop. 6.* the Sufficiency of the Scriptures as a Rule of Faith and Practice, and that Christ has given *particular Rules* as to Sacraments, with other Acts of Worship, the Terms of Communion of Saints, the Sorts, Qualifications and Work of the Officers of his Church, and the Discipline thereof.

He has authorized no Man to alter, take away, or add hereto, without divine Revelation; there being the same or more Reason to forbid such Alterations in these, as in the Statutes given to *Israel* about Matters of the same Nature, *Deut. 12. 32.* And what Power Christ has given to any, as to such things, it is for *Edification* therein by Scripture Rule, *2 Cor. 13. 10.* and not to Destruction.

But notwithstanding this, Men assume to alter and add to these things, in Derogation of Christ's Authority and Wisdom.

What we insist on is, that those things be conformed to Scripture Rule, which are capable of being directed by that Rule, and were designed by Christ to be so. We account the Changes and Additions to be such, that upon the same Grounds as these are imposed (though called *indifferent*) all Ministers qualified as Christ appoints, may be incapable to be Ministers, or act as such; and all Saints qualified for

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Communion of Saints, to the full of what Christ requires, may be made incapable of Communion of Saints; for many things of the same kind may be added, as warrantably as a few; and what are enjoined minister such ground of Scruple, as may very possibly be generally scrupled by others, as well as by us.

I shall hint only at a few: Some Ceremonies (as the Cross) are made so significant and a-kin to Sacraments, that they who deny them to be Sacraments, have no good Reason to deny it, but that Christ did not institute them, though used to the same spiritual Purposes. Again, such Persons as are neither the Parents nor Proprietors of the Infants are required to dedicate them to God, personate them in the Baptismal Vows, and to claim the Covenant Blessings for them; whereas it's only the believing Parent or Proprietor, to whom God has assured such Blessings for their Infants, or given a Right to dedicate or put them under the Obligation of such Vows.

In Addition to the Hint above concerning Ceremonies, it's observable, that several Ceremonies of the same sacred Significancy were observed in the Church of *Israel*, but God entrusted none of them to Man's Direction: Our Lord removed those, and made a Freedom from them a part of that Christian Liberty, wherein we are commanded to stand fast, *Gal. 6. 1.* Have we not Reason to infer, that if Christ had thought such Ceremonies suited to the spiritual and rational Nature of his Kingdom, he would not have abrogated those which were of divine Original, to make room for such as are invented by Men? Or is it probable, that if Christ had judg'd Rites of the same sort fit for the Christian Church, he had not himself appointed them, and not left them to the Judgment and Choice of fallible Men, naturally apt, and oft tempted to mistake, to exceed, and to be more zealous for their own Inventions, than the Institutions of our blessed Lord?

If those things mentioned, *Col. 2. 16, 17.* about Days, new Moons, Sabbaths, Meats, &c. be the *Mosaic* Institutions, and Shadows of Gospel-Mysteries, (as many think); they are forbidden, because the Body is of Christ, i. e. he introduced, possesseth, and dispenseth the Substance opposed to these Shadows; the very same is as strong an Argument against

the like Shadows after his coming as before; for the Body is of him now in greater Evidence.

If (as others think) those Shadows were such as the *Jews*, or (as others think) they who were *Christians*, invented of their own Heads, that Text does expressly condemn them, and all such representing Inventions.

As to a *godly Discipline*, the want of it in the Church is still acknowledged in the *Liturgy*, and owned as what is *much to be wished*.

Ministers, as a Qualification for their Office, are enjoin'd to swear and subscribe what the most conscientious Persons, who submit thereto, are forced for the Quiet of their Consciences, to interpret contrary to the *literal Sense*.

Many things might be added, but my Design is only to hint at a few of those, which Dissenters cannot think so indifferent, as not to believe, that they serve the Interest of Christ by dissenting from them, as *Prop. 1, 2, 3*.

Is not his Authority, Honour, the Purity of his Worship, and the Spiritual Benefit of his Church, what we labour and bear our Testimony for herein? Had the Church from the Apostles Days kept to the Scripture Rule in such Matters, many Mischiefs had been prevented, especially the Rise of the Papal *Man of Sin*: Nor are these things the less, but the more culpable, by his *Abuse* of them, and their Conduciveness to the Return of his Dominion in any Place. But we have this Comfort, that upon his Ruin the Temple shall be measured, and all such Corruptions shall cease by our Lord's (the true *Head of the Church*) bringing all things in his Church to his *own Pattern*, which is predicted in the eight last Chapters of *Ezekiel*, and *Chap. 20*, and *21*, of the *Revelations*: then as *Ez. 44. 24. they shall keep my Laws and Statutes in all my Assemblies*.

(2.) The Dissenters apprehend these things to be so publickly and long contended, and attended with such great Consequences, that they both scruple them on that Account, and reckon a Dissent from them to be their Adherence to the Cause of Christ in that Point, wherein he at present trieth their Fidelity to him, as *Prop. 4, 5*.

A full Conformity to all the Laws of Christ is at all times a Duty, and the least Deviation a Fault; but the same Stress is not at all times to be laid on every Point of Duty,

as it stands in opposing what contradicts his Rules, or promoting of a Compliance with them. For it has not always the same Subserviency to that Design, which Christ is effecting; the same Degree of Light about it is not darted into the Minds of his Servants: The Evil opposed is not always alike dangerous, and struggled for, or more essential Matters are to be almost wholly attended to: As when far greater Abuses are removing, and some very essential Part of the Christian Constitution to be set up. In such Cases, Things more minute and doubtful, are not so discriminating; nor are the Contraries, that Part of the Interest of the Redeemer, which is at that Time to be prosecuted with the same Zeal, as the greater Matters then depending.

We find the Apostles over-look'd the *Jewish* Rites, while the Point at present contested with the *Jews* was, whether Jesus our Redeemer was the *Messiah*? But when that Truth was received by them, and the Judaizing Christians contended for those Rites as necessary, and to be imposed on the Gentile Christians, the Apostle *Paul* engageth with Zeal against them, and contends for their Removal, as a sacred Part of the Cause of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In like Manner at the Beginning of the Reformation, the viler and idolatrous Corruptions of Popery were the great Subject of Trial; and these lesser Matters debated by few, (tho' by some of the best Men even in King *Edward's* Days) they esteem'd it a great Mercy to introduce what was contrary to those horrid Papal Abominations; and as much as they thought possible to gain at that Time, among a Clergy and People so very corrupt and superstitious. But it was soon found, those Churches were most happy, who most fully reformed at first; for they, whom God spiriteth for the Work of Reformation, are too oft followed by others, much apter to relapse, than to proceed in what is well begun.

In Queen *Elizabeth's* Reign, Conformity was disapproved by great Numbers, but not urged for many Years, nor attended with the same evil Effects as after 1588. Many Bishops, a House of Commons, a Convocation, and several prime Statesmen, interpos'd for the Ease of Dissenters; but by a Fondness of Pomp and Forms above a preaching Ministry,

try, all their Attempts prov'd unsuccessful. Those Impositions and Severities increas'd still more in the two following Reigns.

All Men know what Designs were laid in the Reign of King *Charles II.* and how much a further Heap of Impositions was conducive to bring about those unhappy Purposes, (if Popery and Slavery by Profaneness deserve that Epithet.) But tho' these were by a signal Providence restrained in that Reign, and by a Miracle defeated (as we thought) when just upon Accomplishment, in the Reign of King *James II.*; yet no Endeavours of the glorious Instrument of our Deliverance, no Methods adjust'd by wise and moderate Bishops, no Calamities attending a tedious War, (when Union is so necessary) no Danger of Popery, however great, are able to this Day to abate these human Impositions.

Thus for near two hundred Years they have divided the Nation, and caus'd warm and publick Contests. The Consequences of these Impositions are to be lamented; for many thousand of faithful Ministers have been silenced from time to time; Love among Christians destroy'd by mutual Censure; many violent Persecutions against Multitudes, for no pretended Crime, except Non-Conformity; Foundations shaken: Civil Rights hazarded; much Time and Pains employ'd about the Defence of these Inventions, which had otherwise been laid out to the real Benefit of Souls: From these our Popish Enemies have been oft (and still are) encourag'd to attempt, and hope the Restoration of Popery. It's too notorious, that very many place the most of their Religion, and Hopes of eternal Life, in their Observance of these, tho' they remain ignorant and regardless of the Essentials of Christianity: By these the most wicked and profane come to be necessitated to receive the Sacrament, and obtain Opportunity, and gain a Handle to asperse and abuse Men who appear truly godly, yea, Holiness it self so far, that the most godly Persons of their own Communion are by them branded with the Name of *Presbyterians*, (a Title with them more odious than that of Papists) How many Persons fit to serve the Government, are rendred useless and incapable? These are some of the Fruits of our Impositions. And yet the *Imposers* acknowledge, that they are but small things,

things, indifferent Matters, no Part of Worship, not necessary to Salvation; and what the Church may alter. Whereas we, on the other side, can't without sinning against the Dictates of our Consciences, comply with or declare for them; and are perswaded we cannot be faithful to the Interest of Christ Jesus, unless we in our Stations endeavour a Reformation of such *Terms* of the Gospel-Ministry and Communion of Saints, as he never appointed, and both are and will be still attended with such pernicious Consequences; and yet are so unapt and unnecessary to any better Purposes, that a *Christian Church* upon fewer such Experiments should be possessed of *Charity* enough to remove them long since, tho' our Scruples had been but the *Infirmities of weak Brethren*, Rom. 15. 1. Nay, was it ever known, that even Civil Governments, only to shew their Power to impose, continued what they found so long useless and hurtful?

How useful our Dissent has been to keep up the Power of Religion, and excite Diligence even in the publick Ministry, I leave to the Judgment of wise Observers. Nor it is necessary to spend Words to prove, that such of our People as are convinced, that we Ministers are pleading the Cause of Christ Jesus, ought not to desert us, but to support our Testimony in what concerneth *Ministerial* as well as Lay-conformity.

I had not treated at all of these Matters, if the following Case could have been resolved, without supposing that the Members of Dissenting Churches are perswaded, that a Reformation of the Matters in Debate at present, when attended with such Consequences, is the Cause of Christ, and what is implied in their Relation to separate Churches.

II. I proceed to state the Question,

1. *Negatively.* 'Tis not, 1. Whether Dissenters may have Occasional Communion with the Established Church? This I grant, tho' it's more doubtful than heretofore. Nor, 2. Whether Dissenters may do much Service in Offices of Trust, and should not without just Reasons quit that Capacity for Usefulness? This I affirm, and wish all Offices were fill'd with Men best qualified, of whatever Denomination.

2. *Affirm.*

2. *Affirmatively.* The Question is, whether the Members of Protestant Dissenting Churches in Office, may altogether stately forsake our publick Assemblies for Worship, to become qualified to continue in their Offices?

This I deny, and am fully perswaded it's the Will of Christ they should quit their Offices, and adhere to our publick Assemblies where they have Opportunity.

I shall offer some *Reasons*, why they may not stately absent from our publick Assemblies, to become qualified to keep their Offices.

R. 1. *It's against the Nature of that Christian Profession, which the Word of God enjoineth.*

We are not only to hold fast the Faith in our Hearts, but we must *hold fast the Profession of Faith without wavering*, Heb. 10. 23. *i. e.* We must do nothing that appears a disowning of any Article of Faith, or of any thing by which an unfeigned Faith is to be instanced. And we must also openly avow these, when we have a just Call and fit Opportunity to do so. What is opposite to either of these, is a disowning the Faith, and rejecting the Profession of it. As it is a Wickedness to deny Christ, so he reckons it an Abomination *to be ashamed of him and his Words*, Luke 9. 26. *i. e.* so as not to avow them.

Obj. We shall profess the same Faith, and Words of Christ, tho' we forsake the Dissenting Assemblies.

Sol. You will profess them in part, but not to the full Extent. You'll profess them in what's not contended, but you'll disown them in Christ's *present* contended Point. For if the Word of our Blessed Lord require our Dissent, his Interest then is concerned in our Assemblies; and you cannot profess an Adherence to that Part of his Interest, if you forsake our Assemblies. For the Apostle declares the Desertion of their Assemblies to be inconsistent with a right Profession; and that their Presence in those Assemblies, was to be an Instance of their Profession, Heb. 10. 23, 24. *Hold fast the Profession of Faith, &c. not forsaking the assembling of your selves together, as the manner of some is.* Now can any imagine, that the private Meeting of Nine must not be a very defective Profession, in a Place where publick Assemblies are held? (But of this hereafter.) Such a Practice (as far

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as evident) is a professing that Christ has not an Interest in such deserted Congregations, to which you stand related.

When *Darius* signed a Decree, that whosoever shall ask any Petition of any God or Man, save of himself, should be cast into the Den of Lions; *Daniel* did not shut his *Windows*, or alter his *Custom*; but thought it a Matter of Conscience, to venture Office and Life too, rather than let his Enemies want Evidence, that no Decree should restrain him from daily praying to his God, *Dan.* 6. 7, 9, 10.

R. 2. *It's a deserting of those Persons, whom God requireth you to own and adhere to.*

We find it expressly charged, *2 Tim.* 1. 8. *Be not ashamed of the Testimony of Christ, nor of me his Prisoner.* Which informs us, that when some are eminently exposed for the Testimony of Christ, it's a Fault in others to carry towards them, as if ashamed to own them. It's the Character of persevering Believers, *Heb.* 10. 33. *They were Companions of such as endured Reproach, and were a Gazing-stock for the Truth.* And *Onesiphorus* is highly praised for this, *2 Tim.* 1. 16. *He was not ashamed of my Chain*; but on the contrary, *Demas* is condemned for forsaking of *St. Paul*, from a Love of this present World, *2 Tim.* 4. 10. And they of *Asia* fell under dangerous Guilt, by not standing by him in his Trial, *ver.* 16.

To apply this to our Case. Such of you as shall now forsake our Publick Assemblies, do refuse to share in the Reproach of our Incapacity for Publick Offices; for you desert them to continue your publick Employment, in a time when none who are present in them, are allow'd to be in any Office. Must you not appear to disown us as not assembling to maintain and promote the Cause of Christ at this time; or else as unworthy to bear any Office; or at best you declare, that if all we Dissenters were in Office, then all these publick Assemblies must cease, and be reduced to the Number of Nine Persons at most, (besides the Family.) For why may not all such do the same as you? But as the last would make all our Assemblies for Worship contemptible, and unfit to answer many of the Purposes, for which Christian Assemblies were instituted; so to disown us as incapacitated

for Offices by our being Dissenters, and yet continuing in our publick Assemblies, is to disown us as having the Cause of Christ in our Hands, and as suffering for it too; which Cause you have long professed to be the Sentiments of your Conscience, yea, may not I say you can't always oppose, or easily renounce those Sentiments, whilst you act from Principle, and not from secular Interests. Moreover, by absenting from our Assemblies you withhold from them, whatever Reputation, Safety, Strength and Assistance your Presence would afford. It concerns you to ponder how this will be accounted for, which in the Country is like to be destructive to most of their Meetings.

R. 3. Your Desertion is directly contrary to the Rules, by which our Lord Jesus has appointed his Churches to walk.

It's the Appointment of Christ, that all the Members of the Church meet together in one Place, Rich and Poor, 1 Cor. 11. 18, 32. an *Erastus* is not exempted (tho' he was Chamberlain of Corinth, Rom. 16. 23.) so 1 Cor. 14. 23. *If the whole Church come together in one Place.* Acts 15. 22, 25. *The whole Church assembled with one Accord.*

Obj. Some of us will keep dissenting Chaplains, or meet together to the Number of *Nine*, besides those of the Family.

Sol. 1. This will reach to very few; they are not many who are able to keep Chaplains; and how is it possible in Country-Places and small Corporations, to provide Ministers for these several small Meetings, when in most Places they can scarce furnish a Minister for the publick Meeting?

Sol. 2. This might be better urg'd in a time of such Persecution, as when there were no Opportunities for the Church to meet in a more publick Assembly. But,

Sol. 3. That's not the Case at present, for there are Places, where the Churches, of which you are Members, are allow'd, and do meet together; and therefore you must altogether separate from the Church in all its publick Ordinances, or relinquish your Office. As you are Members of the Church, you are by the Rule of the Gospel obliged to meet in one Place with the Church, as you have Opportunity; there you are to partake of the Lord's Supper, and other publick Ordinances. To neglect this is a plain Breach of Gospel-

Gospel-Order, and must bring every Church into Confusion. To pretend Communion in *Affection only* with a Church to which you stand related, and omit *local* Communion when you have Opportunity for it, is an hypocritical Pretext, and a vain Plea for that Separation, which is a great Evil, unless Cause be given for it on the Part of the Church to which you belong. This one Reason is sufficient, were there no other, to determine the Case as to Church Members.

R. 4. *It's an Approbation of what reflects on the Communion of Saints, which ought to be regarded as a great Article of the Christian Faith.*

If you retain your Offices upon the present Terms, you declare against Communion with all of us in any of our Assemblies. You must have no Communion with the *French* or *Dutch* Churches among us, who use not the National Liturgy; is it in vain for them and us to say, We are reformed Churches as to Faith and Worship, and yet you renounce Communion with us, as if we were heretical and idolatrous, and justly branded as incapable, not only of publick Trust, but of your Christian Fellowship in all publick Ordinances.

It is indeed strange, that *Pagans* allow'd those Men to be in Offices, who acted according to their Consciences, tho' very contrary to the National Establish'd Worship, and Usages. *Daniel* was chief of the *Presidents*; *Nehemiah*, *Mordecai*, and others were great Officers at *Court*; *Cornelius* and others were Officers in the *Army*. *Eraustus* the Chamberlain of the *City of Corinth*; and yet among Protestants, we must be made incapable of any of those Offices, tho' we subscribe the same Articles of the Christian Faith, and differ in nothing truly Protestant.

But it will be yet stranger, that any dissenting Protestants, especially such as have found the Presence of God with us, and are Seals to our Ministry, that these, I say, by retaining their Offices on the enacted Terms, shou'd comply to renounce Communion with us, and so far approve of such narrow Inclosures, as leave so reproachful a Mark on the most reformed Churches; if the Scriptures be allowed the Standard, Lord! where will this end? Is this the Unity,

Charity, and Fellowship so oft recommended by the Spirit of God, Eph. 4. 2, 3, 4. &c.

R. 5. *It condemns all who suffer'd for the dissenting Cause, and for keeping up their Assemblies in Times of Persecution.*

The Apostle blames them as faulty, who added Afflictions to his Bonds, Phil. 1. 16. If your owning this Cause which you have so long professed; and if your peaceable Enjoyment of these Assemblies be not worth laying down an Office; you declare them Fools, who to transmit the first, and procure the last, endured Fines, Imprisonment, Reproach, and spoiling of Goods, ruining of their Families, Loss of profitable Places and Preferments, yea, and some their Lives too: But I must tell you, they gloried in what they suffer'd, they had Joy and Peace of Conscience in their dying Hours, and thankfully acknowledg'd the Grace of God, whereby they were supported to endure all their Hardships for what they esteem'd so good a Cause. Nor have we any reason to esteem this Cause of Christ the worse, because deserted in a time of Degeneracy, and Decay of the Power of Religion; yea, I am sure, it will revive, as holy Tendernefs, and vital Religion recover in these Nations, and the true Interest of our Redeemer gaineth place in the Hearts of Men. In the mean time, what Guilt and Ground of future Terror do the degenerate Offspring of these faithful Sufferers contract? Who to prevent Suspicion, despise their Ancestors, and exceed the vilest in Malignity.

R. 6. *This can't be without giving great Offence and Scandal.*

The Word of God plainly forbids this, 1 Cor. 10. 32. *Give none Offence, neither to Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the Church of God.* It is Offence given, for it's doing what's not your Duty, by either Precept or approved Example in the Word, and you can't but foresee, it will lead many to sin. Some are likely to imitate your Example against the Dictates of their Consciences. Many in the Country, who cannot find ways for those separate Meetings of Nine, (by which you palliate the Matter) will be led by your Compliance to cast off all that seems any Adherence to this Interest,

terest, it will fortify the Charge of *Hypocrisy*, which the censorious wickedly imputed to you heretofore. These call'd you Hypocrites, because you *occasionally* communicated; as they said, only for a Place. To this you *justly* pleaded, it was not so, for you only put in Practice a Principle receiv'd and practis'd by the most eminent Dissenters, before the Sacramental Test was enacted; and you being of the same Judgment, had no Reason to refuse to act according to your known Judgment, when it made you capable to serve your Country.

But now you will have no such Pleas: Can you pretend, that it was ever the Principle of any Dissenter, that Men may *flauntedly* forsake the publick Assemblies of Dissenters to keep an Office? Or did any besides Deserters ever do so? Therefore you tempt them to fix the Charge of Hypocrisy on you, though they know not your Hearts.

It's well if they be not further tempted to make *Political* Tests, which may keep out of Office all such as seem to favour Dissenters in their Hearts, (though for the sake of Civil Liberties;) for seeing this is not sufficient to keep out all those as would still appear Dissenters, (whom many resolve to exclude one way or other) such will be apt to endeavour another Test: Nay, I wish they be not tempted to revive old Severities against our publick Meetings; for when they see leading Dissenters desert them to get or keep a Place, they'll be apt to think, that their Severities were unsuccessful formerly, because there was more religious Strictness among us; but that they may now succeed, when Dissenters are become so lukewarm and indifferent in the Matters of God, and Interests of our Lord Jesus. Again, will not your forsaking our Assemblies encourage many of our People to set up private separate Meetings, though they have no Offices, when they see you keep your Meetings, if it be without publick Reproof.

I will pass by the Grief it may cause to your Ministers and Fellow-Members, when thus despised and deserted; though this should make some Impression on Men of Charity and Tenderness.

It's worthy our Notice, though I will not pretend to draw a positive Reason from what's so obscure, as is the surprizing uncommon way, by which this Trial comes upon Dissenters in Office,

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A Dismission from all Places of publick Trust is unanimously given, by *both* Parties, (whatever different Views they had) nor can I doubt, that the first Springs of this Affair *at present* were moved by better Purposes, than the Nature of it imports, and not from such ill Designs against us, as many may suggest.

However that be, I can't but think so uncommon a Providence has some answerable Purpose to serve by it, and loudly speaks to us as a discriminated Body. Without any doubt it calls us to be humbled, try our Ways, and to repent of whatever may forfeit or unfit us for publick Trust in God's Account; it compels us also to be wiser and more united, and requires our charitable Assistance to such, as shall by the Loss of their Places become unable to subsist their Families.

I dare not pretend to any Positiveness as to the farther Reaches of this Providence: It may be for our Safety, it may be God intends for some time to confine our Activity more to what concerns the Improvement of our Liberty to Spiritual Purposes, waiting for farther Light in Accomplishment of *Zech. 14. 7. At Evening time it shall be Light.*

I remember the Voice in *Jerusalem, (go to Pella)* was obey'd by the Christians, and proved the Means of their Security, when they in the City fought against each other, as soon as the *Romans* intermitted their Assaults. And the Apostle has Respect to the Desolations, that came upon that People by the *Roman Armies*, in *Heb. 10. 25. Not forsaking the assembling your selves together at the manner of some is, but exhorting one another, and so much the more, as you see the Day approaching.* Whence you may infer pertinently to the Question before us, that upon the Approaches of publick Calamities, Professors, instead of forsaking the Assemblies and edifying Conversation of their Brethren, ought to attend them more and more.

Finally, Men may be *Outcasts*, with a Promise of much Good, instead of incurring any Damage, *Isa. 66. 5, 7, 8, 9. Hear the Word of the Lord, ye that tremble at his Word, your Brethren that hated you, that cast you out for my Name's sake, said, Let God be glorified; but he shall appear to your Joy, and they shall be ashamed, &c.* The following Verses tell you, it's as signally and suddenly, as if a Nation were born at once.

Obj.

Obj. If we resign our Office, we lose an Opportunity for Service.

Sol. 1. God may fill up your Places another way.

2. However, God requires no Service from you, nor will accept, nor usually succeed it, when undertaken on sinful Terms; and he forbids you *to do Evil, that Good may come of it.*

3. I appeal to every unbiass'd awaken'd Conscience, whether you are obliged to continue the little Service you can perform in your Office, when it must be by renouncing your Profession, deserting those who are subserving the Interest of Christ, violating the Gospel-Rule, (whereby Church-Members are to assemble together with the Church *in one Place*) approving what's destructive to the Communion of Saints, condemning all those who suffer'd for the Dissenting Cause and Assemblies, giving an Occasion of Offence to many, and disregarding the Voice of the present surprizing Providence, which may intend your Safety and Benefit. I am perswaded no Man's Service among us can be justified against the Force of these Reasons.

Obj. We came into our Office by a special Providence.

Sol. That was not to continue in it upon these Terms, but to shew your Fidelity to Christ by laying it down. This ungodly Age reckons all Religion to be a Trick or meer Fancy, and all Pretenders to it to be designing, and so selfish, that they will suffer nor lose nothing for it. It concerns all pious Men not to confirm any in these Atheistical Notions; God oft confuted them by his People voluntarily chusing to suffer, rather than desert his Cause, and violate their Consciences. Such an Occasion has this signal Providence set before you, the Lord grant you may not abuse it by Unfaithfulness.

I have delivered my own Soul: And since it was necessary that some or other of us should guard our People against the present Temptation, I was the willinger to undertake it, because it's known, that my Subsistence is no way concern'd in any Mens forsaking or abiding with us; and therefore I can have no Regard to any secular Interest, when I declare my Judgment.